

RECOMMENDED OUTCOMES OF THE
BLAINE HOUSE CONFERENCE
Aquaculture

1. Policy Development

Maine needs to adopt an explicit policy including a shared vision and strategy for uses of its coastal waters. The policy must be substantive, balancing a diversity of legitimate interests, and include clear guidelines and performance standards. As pointed out in Spencer Apollonio's background paper, there has been a great deal of controversy about where and what kind of aquaculture facilities are appropriate along the coast of Maine. In part due to a lack of an overall policy on coastal use, conflicts have occurred over numerous aquaculture proposals.

2. Aquaculture Task Force and Stakeholder Advisory Council

The Governor initiated LD 1519 to appoint an Aquaculture Task Force that would address specific issues and make recommendations to the legislature by January 31, 2004. The taskforce members were selected based on their balanced views on aquaculture and their in-depth knowledge of the Maine coast. The DMR, in collaboration with the Maine Coastal Program, is working hard to create a fair and open public process for Task Force deliberations. A Stakeholder Advisory Council consisting of industry members, environmental groups and municipal government has been set up to give feedback on Task Force recommendations.

Our recommendation to the Governor is to continue his strong support for the Task Force, consider their findings carefully and where appropriate, support implementation of Task Force recommendations with appropriate state agencies.

3. Public Education Program

Spencer Apollonio points out in his background paper that there is a lack of factual public information and outreach about aquaculture in Maine. Neither proponents nor opponents of aquaculture believe that media coverage of Maine aquaculture has been accurate.

Clearly there is a need for better public information about aquaculture. We ask the Governor to work with the Department and the State Planning Office to explore ways to improve public information about aquaculture.

4. An Investment Program

The development of a state aquaculture policy should include a thorough consideration of the benefits of an investment program in aquaculture. In all other countries and provinces where aquaculture has grown into a significant economic contributor, there has been significant public investment. An example is the well-known development and branding of Prince Edward Island Mussels.

In Maine, there has been an investment in public infrastructure. Over the past three years, \$14m in federal funds and \$2m in state funds have been used to purchase, build and staff an aquaculture research facility in Franklin, to set up an aquaculture business incubator at the Darling Center in Walpole and to begin to build an aquaculture program at Washington County Community College in Eastport. We need to continue to seek federal funds and state bond funds to complete these projects.

In addition to the investment in facilities, there is a great need for applied research on shellfish aquaculture and alternative species of finfish that could be cultured in Maine waters. A forthcoming economic impact study will further clarify this need.

Finally, there is a need for technical and business training for people who are building aquaculture businesses. On the technical side, Maine aquaculturists have been diligent and innovative in developing their own equipment and practices. However, aquaculture is well developed in other parts of the world—with over 4000 mussel rafts in Spain, hundreds of thousands of tons of scallops harvested in Japan, a thriving rope culture mussel industry in Atlantic Canada and so on. Maine aquaculturists could learn much from their counterparts in other parts of the globe. A training program that granted assistance funds for research, travel and apprenticeships would be most helpful. Our recommendation is to allow Maine Technology Funds to be used for these purposes, as long as the technical training will increase jobs or profitability for Maine aquaculture firms.

On the business training side, a need has been identified for basic training in business topics such as accounting, financing, personnel management and marketing. This is especially true for those who are new to aquaculture. Our recommendation for technical and business training assistance is to work with existing programs, such as the Governor's Training Initiative and the FastTrac program to see how they might be finetuned or reconfigured to meet the needs of the aquaculture industry.